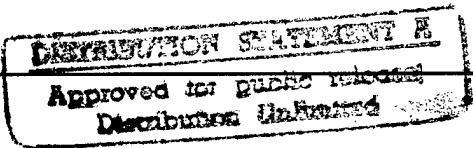


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THE CONTOURS AND DETERMINANTS OF THE PRESIDENT'S  
SECURITY AGENDA

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Arts in the  
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Carl Noakes Brenner, B.S.

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The Ohio State University  
1996

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## THE CONTOURS AND DETERMINANTS OF THE PRESIDENT'S SECURITY AGENDA

By

Carl Noakes Brenner, B.S.

The Ohio State University, 1996

Professor Margaret G. Hermann, Adviser

What issues comprise the president's security agenda? Why does the president's security agenda include some issues and not others? These questions are approached by assessing the president's attention to armed conflicts in speeches and comments from October 1987 to July 1996. The security agenda's composition is found to differ with administrations while remaining limited in scope. The president's overall involvement in security issues climbs and falls dramatically. A series of regression models identify inertia, the persistence of an issue once it has received the president's attention, as the most influential force in determining whether a conflict will receive the president's attention. Despite the strength of inertia, these models show new issues are pushed onto the president's security agenda by factors from the international environment, domestic politics and the president's experience in foreign policy making. The most powerful of these forces of change are shifts in a conflict's intensity and media attention to a conflict. These forces are, however, more important in setting the level of the president's involvement with a conflict than in determining whether the conflict becomes a part of the security agenda.

## ABSTRACT

What issues comprise the president's security agenda? Why does the president's security agenda include some issues and not others? These questions are approached by assessing the president's attention to armed conflicts in speeches and comments from October 1987 to July 1996. The security agenda's composition is found to differ with administrations while remaining limited in scope. The president's overall involvement in security issues climbs and falls dramatically. A series of regression models identify inertia, the persistence of an issue once it has received the president's attention, as the most influential force in determining whether a conflict will receive the president's attention. Despite the strength of inertia, these models show new issues are pushed onto the president's security agenda by factors from the international environment, domestic politics and the president's experience in foreign policy making. The most powerful of these forces of change are shifts in a conflict's intensity and media attention to a conflict. These forces are, however, more important in setting the level of the president's involvement with a conflict than in determining whether the conflict becomes a part of the security agenda.

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## FIELDS OF STUDY

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## INTRODUCTION

Foreign policy, like all public policy, can be considered the result of a sequence of processes. At a minimum these processes include: (1) the setting of the agenda (2) the specification of alternatives (3) an authoritative choice and (4) the implementation of the decision (Kingdon 1994: 2-3). Foreign policy theorists have stated that nations' foreign policy behavior is "that which is to be explained" (C. Hermann 1978). To understand why nations behave as they do, it is necessary to understand all steps of the policy process. Over the past four decades, students of foreign policy have made great strides in explaining how foreign policy decisions are made. However, less effort has been devoted to analyzing the other steps of the foreign policy process. This study strives to help fill this void by examining one important aspect of the president's foreign policy agenda, the security agenda, and how it is set.

The word "agenda" has a great many meanings. Cobb and Elder (1972: 85-87) add precision to the word's use by distinguishing between the systemic agenda and the institutional agenda.<sup>1</sup> They define the systemic agenda as "all issues that are commonly perceived by members of the political community as meriting public attention and as involving matters within the legitimate jurisdiction of governmental authority." The subject under investigation in this study is a portion of the institutional agenda, "that set of items explicitly up for the active and serious consideration of authoritative decision makers."

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<sup>1</sup> Kingdon (1994: 4) makes a similar distinction between the governmental agenda and the decision agenda.

Although a number of studies have investigated agenda setting in domestic politics (e.g. Cobb and Elder 1972, Downs 1972, Light 1991, Kingdon 1994), there is reason to doubt the lessons reaped from these studies apply to the president's security agenda. In foreign policy, crises frequently thrust security issues to the foreground with a rapidity seldom matched in domestic politics. The president's security agenda is subject to pressures from abroad that do not exist in domestic policy. Allies press the U.S. to put its considerable weight behind issues they believe are important. Opponents challenge American interests with military force. The nature of presidential authority differs greatly in the two policy domains. As a result of formal powers granted by the Constitution, the public's desire for strong leadership and the political ramifications of that leadership on the administration, the president can direct foreign policy, especially security policy, with an authority that is not possible on the domestic front (Edwards and Wayne 1985: 289-297).

This research attempts to explain when the president gives his "active and serious consideration" to the armed conflicts that raged abroad from the October 1987 Reykjavik Summit, a date that may be called the "beginning of the end of the Cold War," to July 1996. Lacking access to records that reveal the president's private contemplations, the president's attention to these conflicts in speeches and comments is adopted as a surrogate measure of the chief executive's security agenda. This study examines the president's attention to conflicts for trends that may reveal the basic characteristics of the security agenda including its size, composition and temporal patterns. Drawing on previous investigations into other aspects of foreign policy behavior, this study proffers a theory that factors from the international environment, domestic politics and the president's experience in foreign policy making determine which conflicts receive the president's attention. A series of regression models are

estimated to test this theory. The models are assessed for their implications for the theory under investigation and for future examinations into American foreign policy making.

## A THEORY OF PRESIDENTIAL ATTENTION TO CONFLICTS ABROAD

Why do some conflicts receive the president's attention while others do not? This research posits that the president looks to both the international and domestic environments and is guided by previous experience in foreign policy making in determining which conflicts merit his attention.

### INTERNATIONAL FACTORS

Most foreign policy theorists agree it is necessary to consider the role of international factors when explaining foreign policy behavior. Realists have long claimed international factors are the primary influence on the president's foreign policy actions. In the realist view, the president pursues power (Morgenthau 1978) or security (Waltz 1979) to protect the nation's far-flung interests in an anarchic self-help system. When American interests are threatened, the president can be expected to respond on a tit-for-tat basis with little regard for the demands of domestic politics. Although this perspective has come under fire on nearly all fronts, several recent studies tender evidence that when making foreign policy decisions, the situation abroad largely compels the president's actions (Blechman and Kaplan 1978, Lindsay et al 1992, Meernik 1994, Wang 1996). It is, however, not necessary to subscribe to the assumptions of realism to acknowledge international factors as important to explanations of presidential foreign policy behavior. Most integrative theories of foreign policy behavior (e.g. Snyder et al 1969, Brecher 1972) also specify international factors as major determinants of a nation's actions

abroad. Drawing from both bodies of literature, numerous quantitative studies have explored the influence of a number of international variables on presidential foreign policy behavior. A summary of the international variables explored, findings of significance or insignificance and the subject under investigation in each study are shown in Table 1.

What international factors influence the president's security agenda? In the only existing systematic probe of the president's foreign policy agenda, Wood and Peake (1996) find a surge in the scope and intensity of a conflict leads to increased presidential attention to that conflict. Similarly, both James and Oneal (1991) and DeRouen (1995) conclude the more unstable the conflict, the more likely the president is to intervene with military force.<sup>2</sup> These findings provide significant justification for including a measure of the intensity of events in this study's model of the president's attention to conflicts abroad. This research adopts two international variables not previously evaluated in the presidential foreign policy behavior literature, American trade with parties in the conflict and threats to oil supplies stemming from the conflict. The nation's economic vigor and, many would argue, its strength on the world scene is increasingly dependent on international trade. Because the president's political fate and reputation both at home and abroad is related to the nation's economic health, conflicts that threaten the nation's trading partners are likely to receive the president's attention. The oil shocks of the 1970s made both American leaders and the public painfully aware that the nation's economic health relied on access to foreign oil. In his 1980 State of the Union Address, President Carter clearly stated the U.S. would use force if necessary to guarantee this access. The U.S. has undertaken a number of military operations to carry out Carter's threat, most notably the escort and re-flagging of oil tankers during the "tanker wars" of the Iran-Iraq war and

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<sup>2</sup> Wood and Peake (1996) use the PANDA events dataset to measure the scope and intensity of a conflict. Both James and Oneal (1991) and DeRouen (1995) rely on the Index of Severity as developed by Brecher and James (1986) in *Crisis and Change in World Politics*.

Variable	Variable significant	Variable insignificant	Subject of Investigation
US-USSR tensions	Ostrom and Job (1986) James and Oneal (1991) Lindsay et al (1992) DeRouen (1995)		Use of force Use of force Conflict/cooperation Use of force
US-USSR strategic balance		Ostrom and Job (1986) James and Oneal (1991) DeRouen (1995)	Use of force Use of force Use of force
USSR involved in conflict or conflictual behavior with other nations	Stoll (1984) Lindsay et al (1992) Meernik (1994)		Use of force Conflict/cooperation Use of force
US involvement in conflict or crises elsewhere	Ostrom and Job (1986) Lindsay et al (1992) Meernik (1994) DeRouen (1995) Wang (1996)	James and Oneal (1991)	Use of force Use of force Conflict/cooperation Use of force Use of force Use of force
Prior US use of force		Stoll (1984) Meernik (1994)	Use of force Use of force
Severity of Conflict	James and Oneal (1991) DeRouen (1995) Wood and Peake (1996)		Use of force Use of force Foreign policy attention
US military presence	Meernik (1994)		Use of force
US military aid to nation involved in crisis	Meernik (1994)		Use of force
Anti-US threats/violence	Meernik (1994)		Use of force
Expected utility for war <sup>3</sup>	Wang (1996)		Use of force

Table 1. International Variables in Quantitative Studies of Presidential Foreign Policy Making

<sup>3</sup> Wang (1996:79) calculates the expected utility for war as a function of perceived probability of success weighted by the difference between the U.S. preferred outcome and the U.S. perception of the opponent's preferred outcome.

Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Therefore, it seems likely the president also attends to conflicts that threaten oil supplies.

This inquiry does not evaluate the explanatory power of many of the variables listed in Table 1. Those variables related to the former U.S.S.R. are excluded because they are unlikely to weigh heavily on the president's contemplations in the post Cold War era. Wang's measure of expected utility for war is also rejected because there is no obvious tie to the president's attention to conflicts abroad. Other variables may well be linked to the president's security agenda but are not investigated in this study due to time constraints or a great difficulty involved in identifying a measure of the variable. For example, it is quite reasonable to expect that when the U.S. is involved in a crisis, the president is less likely to attend to other security issues. Because threats to the nation's reputation and the safety of its citizens are likely to pique the president's interest, the president may also be more likely to attend to conflicts if the U.S. has previously employed force in the conflict, if American troops are stationed in one of the nations involved, if the U.S. provides military assistance to one of the parties or if there are threats or violence against Americans. These variables merit examination in future studies.

## DOMESTIC FACTORS

Whether domestic politics play a significant role in presidential foreign policy behavior remains a heated debate. A number of studies have found, contrary to the tenets of realism, that domestic politics greatly influence the nation's foreign policy (e.g., Stoll 1984, Ostrom and Job 1986, Russett 1990, Gaubatz 1991, James and Oneal 1991, De Rouen 1995). The president's success and power is linked to his ability to meet the public's expectations concerning peace, prosperity, domestic tranquillity and leadership. To succeed, the president must be sensitive to public attitudes toward involvement abroad as well as to domestic considerations such as the

state of the economy. Additionally, the president must maintain and enhance his “political resource base” to ensure his re-election and the ability to implement his preferred policies. To accomplish this, the president necessarily keeps an eye on both the electoral calendar and his approval ratings (Ostrom and Job 1986: 545).

Based on this justification, it is worthwhile to investigate the influence of domestic variables on the president’s attention to conflicts abroad. According to Wood and Peake (1996), the president responds to media attention to conflicts because it shapes the issues the public believes to be important. This finding merits further exploration. Research into the president’s decision to use force has unearthed evidence that variables directly related to the president’s power and survival, including presidential approval, the state of the economy and the shadow of approaching elections, powerfully influence the president’s foreign policy behavior. However, the direction of the relationship between these variables and the president’s foreign policy behavior remains unclear. Some studies find support for diversionary theories that when events at home turn against the president or when elections approach, the president is more likely to pursue dramatic policies abroad (Stoll 1984, Ostrom and Job 1986, James and Oneal 1991, DeRouen 1995). Other researchers suggest a downturn on the domestic front and rapidly approaching elections demand the president’s time, energy and resources at home, reducing his inclination to act overseas (Lindsay et al 1992). Although the effects of these variables remain uncertain, their close link to the president’s time, energies and power suggest they are likely to influence the president’s inclination to attend to conflicts abroad.

Several factors frequently associated with the president’s foreign policy behavior are not explored in this study. As with the international variables, those variables tied to U.S. - Soviet relations are unlikely to influence the president’s behavior in the current era. Although Wang (1996) found that when the president’s partisan allies control Congress, the president is more

Variable	Variable significant	Variable insignificant	Subject of Investigation
US-USSR tensions when foreign policy is primary public concern	Ostrom and Job (1986) James and Oneal (1991)	DeRouen (1995)	Use of force Use of force Use of force
US-USSR strategic balance when foreign policy is primary public concern	Ostrom and Job (1986)	James and Oneal (1991) DeRouen (1995)	Use of force Use of force Use of force
Aversion to war due to war weariness	Ostrom and Job (1986) James and Oneal (1991) DeRouen (1995)		Use of force Use of force Use of force
Weighted misery index	Ostrom and Job (1986) James and Oneal (1991) DeRouen (1995) Wang (1996)	Meernik (1994)	Use of force Use of force Use of force Use of force Use of force
Business expectations	Lindsay et al (1992)		Conflict/cooperation
Presidential approval	Ostrom and Job (1986) James and Oneal (1991) DeRouen (1995) Wang (1996)	Lindsay et al (1992) Meernik (1994)	Use of force Use of force Conflict/cooperation Use of force Use of force Use of force
Overall presidential success	Ostrom and Job (1986) James and Oneal (1991) DeRouen (1995)	Wang (1996)	Use of force Use of force Use of force Use of force
Approaching elections	Stoll (1984) James and Oneal (1991) Wang (1996)	Ostrom and Job (1986) Lindsay et al (1992) Meernik (1994) DeRouen (1995)	Use of force Use of force Use of force Conflict/cooperation Use of force Use of force Use of force
Presidential control of Congress	Wang (1996)	DeRouen (1995)	Use of force Use of force
Partisan approval		Wang (1996)	Use of force
Media attention	Wood and Peake (1996)		Foreign policy attention

Table 2. Domestic Variables in Quantitative Studies of Presidential Foreign Policy Making

likely to employ military force, it seems unlikely that control of Congress is directly related to the president's attention to foreign policy issues. Other causal variables that have been linked to the president's actions in the foreign policy arena merit further exploration but are not analyzed in this study due to lack of time and difficulties in measurement. Both Ostrom and Job (1986) and DeRouen (1995) find the U.S. is less likely to employ military force abroad in the era following a war. They attribute this to a "war weariness" on behalf of the public. Although the U.S. did not engage in a long-running engagement during the era under investigation, many commentators remarked that Americans suffered from sympathy fatigue following a rapid succession of military and humanitarian operations in the Persian Gulf, Somalia and Haiti. It is plausible that sympathy fatigue may lead a president to turn to domestic issues at the expense of attention to foreign affairs. A decline in overall presidential success as measured by the difference in the president's initial and current levels of popularity has also been linked to an increased propensity to act on the world scene. It is possible that the greater the decline, the more likely a president may be to increase his involvement in foreign policy issues as a means of deflecting attention from the administration's long term failure.

## PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Investigations into heads of government in general (e.g., M. Hermann 1984, 1987) and American presidents specifically (e.g., George and George 1956, George 1980, Burke and Greenstein 1989) have demonstrated that a leader's personal characteristics can significantly affect the issues addressed, the alternatives considered, and the policy selected when the leader is the authoritative decision maker (M. Hermann 1993). Greenstein posits that a leader's personal characteristics will be especially important when: the situation is ambiguous, there are no standardized "mental sets" whether role expectations or ideology, sanctions are not attached to

given courses of action, the leader has high intensity of feelings, or when there are great demands on the leader to act at high levels of skill (1975: 19-21). David Winter suggests “these conditions are perhaps most often met in the arena of foreign policy” (1993: 80).<sup>4</sup>

Despite these claims, there has been little effort to quantitatively assess the role of the president’s personal characteristics in integrative explanations of presidential foreign policy behavior. A major reason for this shortfall is the lack of personality measurements of a large number of presidents. It is possible to suggest a number of personal characteristics that may be related to the president’s attention to conflicts abroad. A president who is interested in foreign policy may be more likely to address foreign policy issues. If a president has an interest or experience in a specific region, it may affect the president’s propensity toward addressing conflicts in that region. Perhaps the most easily quantifiable personal characteristic is experience. Lacking other personality measurements on Presidents Reagan, Bush and Clinton, this study will investigate the role of experience to demonstrate that personal characteristics influence the president’s security agenda.

Much of the existing quantitative research into presidential foreign policy behavior involves the decision to employ military force abroad. As the leader of a superpower, the president’s decision to employ military force is politics of the highest order and is likely to attract worldwide attention and debate, risk lives and commit significant resources. This research, however, looks into “lower level” foreign policy behavior. Findings from studies of high level decisions may not hold when the topic under investigation is less likely to attract attention or noticeably impact international or domestic politics. Therefore, it is reasonable to anticipate the findings of this study will more closely resemble other investigations into “lower

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<sup>4</sup> The end of the Cold War likely eliminated many of the standardized mental sets, roles and routines that once existed in American foreign policy. Thus, the period under examination is fertile ground for individual characteristics to influence the president’s foreign policy behavior.

level" foreign policy behavior, such as Wood and Peake (1996) and Lindsay et al (1992). Both studies found that international variables were the most important determinants of presidential foreign policy behavior while domestic politics still played a noteworthy, if lesser, role.

## INERTIA

Despite the preceding conjecture that the president's security agenda responds to constantly buffeting forces from the international environment, domestic politics and the president's personal characteristics, it is likely that the agenda displays a high degree of inertia. Once an issue receives the president's attention, he is more likely to revisit it in the future. This inertia stabilizes the president's foreign policy ship and brings a predictability to its course. By adopting an issue as part of his agenda (even if reluctantly), the president has invested a portion of his reputation, time and possibly material resources in the successful management of the issue. Because foreign policy problems, particularly armed conflicts, are highly intractable, the president must follow up on the issue to earn a return on his investment, or at least to avoid the embarrassment of association with a catastrophe (Wood and Peake 1996: 5). As his time and resources are limited, the president's attention to issues which were on his agenda last month limit his ability to assume additional agenda items in the current month. Thus, the same conflicts tend to persist on the president's foreign policy agenda while others never receive his attention. New conflicts climb onto the president's agenda only when forces from the three sources of foreign policy combine to thrust the issue onto the president's attention, possibly displacing other issues.

## MEASURING THE PRESIDENT'S SECURITY AGENDA

It is difficult to know when the president gives an issue his attention. Lacking access to records that reveal presidential contemplations, analysts have frequently relied on what the president says as an indicator of his agenda (e.g., Kessel 1974; Cohen 1982, 1995; Wood and Peake 1996).<sup>5</sup> The president's public words, however, may not reflect his private decisions. Advisers may make a decision without the president's direct involvement. Even if the president later ratifies or expresses his support for the decision, he may never have grappled with the issue himself. The president may address a problem merely to pacify a target audience, even if he never intended to act on it. Important issues that consume much of the chief executive's attention and energies may never surface in the president's comments, perhaps especially if they are controversial. Because the president weighs foreign policy decisions behind closed doors, often under a shroud of secrecy, an issue may simply disappear if he decides to take no action.

Yet there is reason to believe the president truly does speak his mind. As Wood and Peake (1996: 10) point out, the president hopes to garner public approval by appearing "on top of things." Despite his greater autonomy in foreign affairs, the president still uses speeches and comments to build support (or at least gain acquiescence) for his policies with the public, the bureaucracy and the Congress. Because everyone in the White House appreciates the weight attached to words spoken by the president, these words are likely to reflect positions and views

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<sup>5</sup> Although researchers have frequently relied on the president's public statements as indicators of his private considerations, no study has been conducted to evaluate the validity of this method. This could be done by comparing presidential statements with records that have been released to the public.

that have been “hammered out” with the president’s active involvement. Therefore, without access to a more direct measure of the president’s security agenda, it is reasonable to adopt the president’s attention to armed conflicts abroad in speeches and comments as a surrogate.

This study tracks the president’s attention to armed conflicts abroad by analyzing the president’s public statements about all armed conflicts ongoing from October 1987 until July 1996. A list of all armed conflicts was constructed by examining existing lists (SIPRI 1988-1995, Wallensteen and Sollenberg 1995, Mowle 1996), newswire reports (AP, UPI, Reuters, Xinhua, and Kyodo) and newspaper articles (including *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, *The Times of London*, and *The Washington Post*). An armed conflict was defined as a contested incompatibility concerning government and/or territory, where at least two parties use force. Unlike many other definitions of war or armed conflict, no threshold for a minimum number of deaths was established. Newswire and newspaper reports of actual fighting rather than declarations of war or peace were consulted to estimate the date of the start and when relevant, the conclusion of each armed conflict. Each of the 68 conflicts were divided into calendar months yielding 3797 “conflict months” during the tenure of Presidents Reagan, Bush and Clinton for analysis.

To track the president’s comments, the compilation of presidential documents in the “PRESDC” file on Lexis-Nexis, was electronically searched for references to the nations and participants involved in these conflicts.<sup>6</sup> Each “hit” was examined to ensure the president was actually discussed some of aspect of the conflict. To guard against statements that may reflect the concerns of advisers rather than the president himself, only words actually spoken by the president were included. Among the items excluded were letters to Congress, press releases, and

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<sup>6</sup> The Lexis-Nexis compilation is an electronic version of the papers published annually as *The Public Papers of the President*. The Lexis-Nexis version is updated weekly and can be searched electronically.

Conflict	Dates	# Months	Notes in Study
Afghanistan Internal	mid 80's - 7/96+	106	Government vs NIM and others
Algeria Internal	1/92 - 7/96+	55	FIS and GIA "extremists" vs government
Angola Internal	75-5/91, 9/92-11/94	71	91 peace agreement brokedown in 92
Armenia-Azerbaijan	2/88 - 7/96+	102	Includes Nagorno-Karabakh dispute
Bangladesh Internal	82 - 7/96+	106	Government vs. JSS/SB
Burundi Internal	1/88 - 7/96+	103	Tutsi vs Hutu conflict
Cambodia Internal	79 - 7/96+	106	Despite UNTAC, KR strikes continue
Central African Rep.	4/96 - 7/96	4	Mutiny until Fr. Foreign Legion intervention
Chadian Civil War	70 - 1/96	100	Fighting continues despite 1990 new govt
Chechnya	8/94 - 7/96	24	Russia's largest operation since Afghanistan
Columbia Internal	78 - 7/96+	106	Government vs FARC/ELN
Comoros Internal	12/87, 11/89, 8/91, 9/95	4	4 violent coups
Djibouti Internal	7/91 - 12/94	42	Government vs FRUD
Ecuador Internal	80 - 3/89	18	Largest rebel group laid down arms 3/89
Egypt Internal	6/91 - 7/96+	62	Islamic "fundamentalists" vs government
El Salvador Civil	79 - 11/92	62	No sustained fighting since 11/92 cease fire
Eritrean War	71 - 5/91	44	EPLF vs Ethiopia for independence
Georgia Internal	1/92 - 11/94	35	Abkhazian and S. Ossetian separatists
Guatemala Internal	68 - 12/92	63	Government vs URNG guerrillas
Haiti Internal	9/91 - 12/91	4	Army faction and police seize power
India Internal	late 40's - 7/96+	106	Kashmiri, Sikh and other separatists vs. govt.
India - Pakistan	6/84 - 9/92	59	No significant conflict since 9/92
Indonesia - E.Timor	75 - 7/96+	106	Jakarta vs. FRETELIN since Dutch w/withdrawal
Iran Internal	70's - 7/96+	106	Mujahideen e-Khalq and KDP vs. government
Iran - Iraq	6/79 - 10/88	13	8/88 agreement led to end of war
Iraq Internal	8/88 - 7/96+	96	Conflict renewed with end of Iran-Iraq War
Iraq - Kuwait	8/90 - 2/91	7	Multinational force ousted Iraq 2/91
Israel - PLO et al	12/87 - 9/93	70	May have restarted after 9/93 accord
Kenya Internal	11/91 - 12/92	14	Tribal and ethnic conflict
Laos Internal	75 - 6/92	57	ULNLF ceased actions summer '92
Lebanon Civil War	75 - 10/90	37	Aoun mutiny toppled 10/19/90 in last battle
Liberian Civil War	12/89 - 7/96+	80	Fighting continues despite ECOMOG efforts
Libya - Chad	79 - 9/88	12	Battles continued past 87 cease-fire
Mali Internal	11/90 - 7/96+	69	Govt vs. Tuareg tribal groups
Mauritania - Senegal	3/89 - 9/91	31	Border dispute
Mexico - Chiapas	1/94 - 2/92	2	Armed revolt quelled in 2 months
Moldova Internal	1/92 - 7/92	7	Battle for Trans-Dniestr region
Mozambique Civil	76 - 1/93	64	Government vs. RENAMO
Myanmar Internal	48 - 7/96	106	Karen and Mong Tai rebels seek autonomy
Namibian War	63 - 3/90	30	SWAPO vs. S. Africa for independence
Nicaragua - Contra	81 - 4/90	31	4/90 Contra demobilization halted fighting
Niger Internal	11/90 - 7/96+	69	Tuareg and others vs government

continued on next page

Table 3. Armed Conflicts from October 1987 - July 1996

Table 3. (continued)

Nigeria Internal	4/91 - 9/92	18	Christian - Moslem battles
Paraguay Internal	2/89	1	>300 killed as Rodriguez ousted Stroessner
Peru - Ecuador	8/91 - 2/95	43	2/95 pact led to UN observer force
Peru Internal	81 - 7/96+	106	Sendero Luminoso attacks on decline
Philippines Internal	70's - 7/96	106	3 conflicts: NPA, MNLF, Army coups
Romania Internal	12/89	1	Most violent Warsaw Pact revolution
Rwanda Internal	10/90 - 7/96+	70	FNR vs. government
Senegal Internal	9/82 - 1/93	64	MFDC insurrection against the govt.
Sierra Leone Internal	9/91 - 7/96+	59	Conflict continues despite 3/96 agreement
Somali Civil War	3/88 - 7/96+	101	Factions continue struggle for control
South Africa Intl	84 - 12/93	75	ANC, PAC, AZAPO vs. white govt.
Spain Internal	68 - 12/90	39	ETA violence fallen greatly since 90
Sri Lanka Internal	7/83 - 7/96+	106	Tamil Tigers vs. government
Sudan Internal	83 - 7/96+	106	Govt vs. SPLA
Tajikistan Internal	5/92 - 7/96+	51	PDA vs. government
Togo Internal	4/91 - 12/91	9	Military vs. splintered Army factions
Trinidad & Tobago	7/90 - 8/90	2	Coup by Society of Muslims
Turkey Internal	84 - 7/96+	106	PKK vs. Turkey
Uganda Internal	81 - 7/96+	106	Govt vs. LRS and UPA
UK - IRA	? - 7/96+	106	Cease-fire violations keep war on active list
US - Panama	12/89	1	US invasion and capture of Noriega
USSR - Afghanistan	12/79 - 2/89	17	USSR disengaged 2/89
Venezuela Internal	2/92 & 11/92	2	2 violent military coups
Morocco-W. Sahara	76 - 9/91	48	Little conflict since 9/91 cease-fire
Yemeni Civil War	7/94	1	Yemen vs. Dem Repub of Yemen
Yugoslavian Wars	9/90 - 12/95	64	Conflict stopped with 12/95 Dayton Accords
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>3797</b>	

statements by the press secretary. The president's attention to conflicts was gauged by two measures. A dichotomous variable, AGENDA, was coded "1" if the president addressed the conflict during a calendar month and "0" if he did not. This variable indicates whether a conflict was on the agenda but offers no insight into the extent of the president's involvement with the issue or his priorities. To probe these issues, a second variable, AGENDA LEVEL, was created to note the number of paragraphs in which the president referred to a conflict each month.

The focus on the president's attention to armed conflicts makes it possible to systematically study how many of the era's most significant foreign policy issues ascended to the president's agenda. First, it creates a large set of "opportunities" that permit an analysis of the determinants of the president's foreign policy agenda. Second, this approach lends insight into how the majority of the nation's foreign policy crises rise to prominence as most continue to involve security concerns. Third, this method contributes to the growing body of literature on interventions, most of which involve an on-going conflict. When the president adopts an armed conflict as an agenda item, he is likely considering, planning or implementing some form of diplomatic, economic, or military intervention. Of course, it must be acknowledged that this approach does not investigate the president's attention to a great many other issues including foreign economic policy, foreign aid, and global problems such as the environment. As such, it fails to note when the president attended to many of the era's major foreign policy problems such as NAFTA, U.S.-Japan trade relations, the B-2 purchase, the North Korean nuclear program and aid to Russia. These issues are left to other studies and perhaps other methods.

## **EXAMINING THE PRESIDENT'S SECURITY AGENDA**

As existing literature offers meager information on the president's foreign policy agenda, it is worthwhile to begin the quest for patterns and predictors by examining the contents and contours of the AGENDA and AGENDA LEVEL measures. The president addressed 40 of the 68 conflicts (58.8%) during at least one month. Most of the "ignored" conflicts can be grouped into two categories. First, there were brief conflicts such as in Comoros, Mexico, Paraguay, Romania, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Venezuela and Yemen where fighting was limited to a few days or weeks. Second, the president did not attend to several long, simmering contests that presented neither danger of widening nor opportunity for resolution. Most of these conflicts also occurred in regions where the U.S. has few historical, political or economic ties. These conflicts included civil wars in Bangladesh, Burma, Chad, Ecuador, Iran, Laos, Niger, Peru, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Spain, Sri Lanka and Uganda and the border conflict between Peru and Ecuador.

The AGENDA measure shows presidents are very selective in the conflicts they admit to their security agenda. Out of 3797 "conflict months," which stand as opportunities to address conflicts, the president seized only 430 (11.3%) for inclusion on his agenda. The mean number of conflicts per month addressed by the presidents was 4.17 with a standard deviation of 2.29. In 94.3% of months studied, the president's agenda included between one and eight conflicts. Figure 1 depicts the number of conflicts on the president's agenda each month. These figures have important implications for students of American foreign policy. It may well be that too

often analysts ascribe foreign policy decisions to the president when day-to-day management of U.S. foreign policy is handled by policy makers at lower levels.

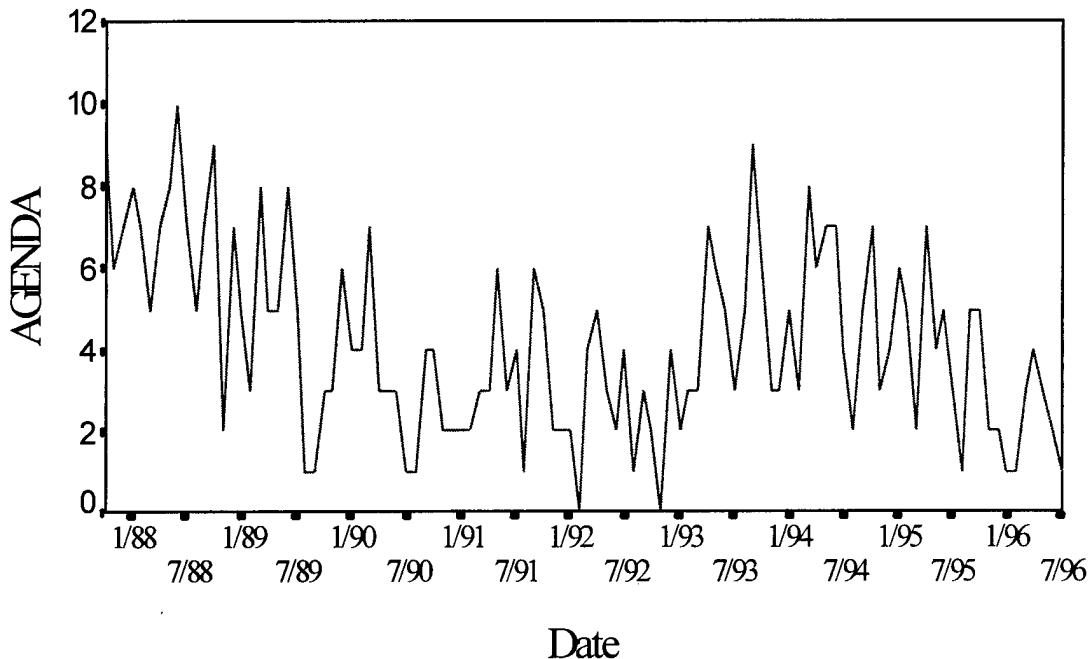


Figure 1. Number of Conflicts on Agenda by Month

Reagan	# Conflicts/month	Bush	# Conflicts/month	Clinton	# Conflicts/month
1987	7.33	1989	4.42	1993	4.58
1988	6.83	1990	3.17	1994	5.08
		1991	3.25	1995	3.92
		1992	2.50	1996	2.14

Table 4. Annual Monthly Averages for AGENDA

As measured by the AGENDA gauge, the president's security agenda was broadest during the Reagan years with an average of 6.93 conflicts per month and narrowst during the

Bush years with an average of 3.67 conflicts per month. Clinton fell between his Republican peers at an average of 4.05 conflicts per month. Table 4 shows the annual average for the AGENDA variable.

It is also useful to examine which conflicts each president adopted. The last 16 months of the Reagan administration can be characterized as broad in the number of conflicts addressed and high in overall foreign policy involvement. Six conflicts were on Reagan's agenda during at least 70% of months studied: Angola, Cambodia, Iran-Iraq, Israel-PLO, Nicaragua, and U.S.S.R.-Afghanistan. The civil war in El Salvador fell just shy of this mark appearing on Reagan's agenda during 67% of months studied. These seven long-running wars constituted the heart of Reagan's foreign policy agenda and accounted for over 94% of his paragraph references to armed conflicts. With these seven conflicts demanding Reagan's time and energies, the 33 other conflicts on-going during the last part of his administration had little chance to gain his attention.

Although George Bush is often thought of as a foreign policy president, neither the breadth of his security agenda nor his overall involvement in security issues stand out. The number of conflicts peaked during Bush's tenure, with 62 separate conflicts on-going at one time or another. Bush's agenda included three brief conflicts which appeared for more than 70% of the conflict's duration: Haiti, Iraq-Kuwait, and the U.S. invasion of Panama. Bush attended to seven conflicts of longer duration during 30-70% of months: Angola, Cambodia, El Salvador, Israel-PLO, Lebanon, Nicaragua and Yugoslavia.

President Clinton's security agenda more closely resembles Bush's than Reagan's. During the first 43 months of his administration, Clinton's agenda included only two conflicts during more than 70% of conflict months: UK-IRA and Yugoslavia. Six conflicts were on his

agenda from 30-70% of the months they raged under his watch: Angola, Central African Republic, Israel-PLO, Rwanda, Somalia and Sudan.

Over the course of these three administrations, the president's security agenda grew increasingly less predictable. The persistent core issues that dominated Reagan's security agenda were largely supplanted by conflicts that quickly emerged and subsided from the president's consideration during the Bush and Clinton years. Yet, where the presidents saw a clear threat to American interests, as in wars against communism, threats to oil access, engagement of American troops in combat and the potentially enormous impact on the nation by a flood of Haitian refugees, the presidents remained consistently attentive to the conflict. This suggests a major cause of increasing turnover in the president's security agenda lies in the increased unpredictability of the perceived sources of threats to American interests. Where Reagan consistently viewed communist-sponsored wars, Israeli security and threats to the flow of Persian Gulf oil as the consistent threats to the nation, Bush and Clinton perceived shorter-lived threats to American interests from a far larger number of conflicts

AGENDA LEVEL is a better meter for the president's overall involvement in security policy.<sup>7</sup> Figure 2 depicts the total number of paragraph references to armed conflicts on a monthly basis and Table 5 shows the presidents' annual averages for the AGENDA LEVEL variable. The average monthly presidential involvement in armed conflicts was 29.94 paragraph references with a standard deviation of 33.1. President Bush had the single largest monthly involvement at 166 paragraph references in August 1990 as he warned Saddam Hussein and rallied audiences at home and abroad in opposition to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Bush also

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<sup>7</sup> That AGENDA and AGENDA LEVEL are indeed different measures is supported by the moderate correlation between the two of Pearson's  $r = .37$ .

presided over the only two months in which no conflicts were on the president's security agenda, February and November 1992.

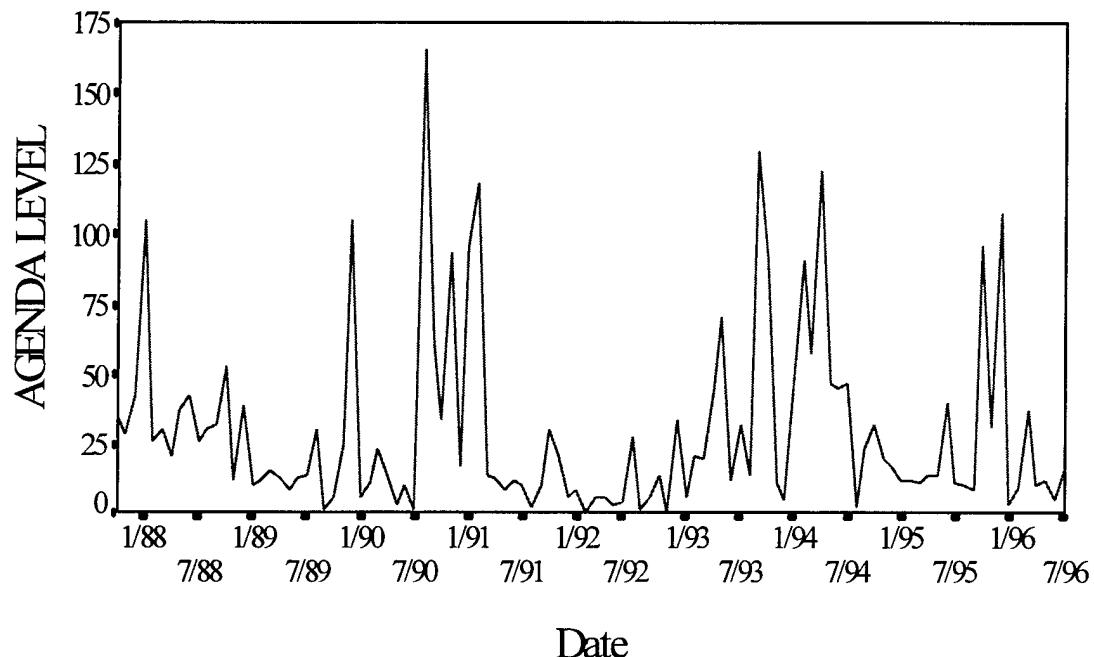


Figure 2. Total Agenda Level by Month

Reagan	# Paragraph References/month	Bush	# Paragraph References/month	Clinton	# Paragraph References/month
1987	35.67	1989	21.00	1993	38.17
1988	37.83	1990	36.67	1994	46.25
		1991	28.25	1995	30.58
		1992	9.17	1996	13.14

Table 5. Annual Monthly Averages for AGENDA LEVEL

As illustrated by both the “spikes” that appear in Figure 2 and the high standard deviation for the AGENDA LEVEL measure, the president’s involvement in security issues is extremely volatile. Attention to conflicts abroad does not appear to climb or fall gradually. Rather, it tends to linger near or below the mean until a sudden “spike” in attention occurs. A “spike” can be arbitrarily defined as a surge in involvement to more than 2 standard deviations above the mean. Table 6 lists all spikes observed and their associated event. Two “spikes” stand out as different from the rest in that they do not appear to be directly associated with dramatic events abroad. Reagan’s burst of involvement in January 1988 reflects his personal attempt to sway Congress to provide aid to the Contras. As such, Reagan was prompted to act not by events abroad but rather by his own personal convictions and the American legislative calendar. President Clinton’s high number of comments regarding the war in the former Yugoslavia in April 1994 consisted largely of responses to reporters’ steady questioning. Clinton contributed to the high tally by making himself available for questioning and providing detailed answers. Yet without the journalists’ questions, it is doubtful that Clinton would have approached the two standard deviation mark.

<b>Spike</b>	<b>Associated Event</b>
Jan 88	Reagan pushing Congress for aid to Contras
Dec 89	Overthrow of Communist governments throughout Eastern Europe.
Aug 90	Iraqi invasion of Kuwait
Feb 91	Desert Storm
Sep 93	Israel-PLO Peace Agreement
Apr 94	Serb assault on Gorazde and NATO ultimatum
Oct 95	U.S.-Brokered cease fire and negotiations prior to Dayton Talks
Dec 95	Former Yugoslavia peace talks in Dayton

Table 6. Association of High Involvement in Security Issues with Major International Events

These AGENDA LEVEL data can compared with Kessel's observations of State of the Union Addresses from Truman to Johnson. Kessel (1974:10) found international affairs involvement increases throughout a president's tenure, in a pattern that can be related to the election cycle. Foreign policy involvement mounts from year one to year three. In year four, foreign policy involvement declines as the president runs for re-election. Once re-elected, involvement in foreign policy reaches its highest levels during the president's seventh and eighth years in office.

The AGENDA LEVEL data show both first term presidents increased their attention to conflicts abroad year one to year two. Bush and Clinton's involvement both declined slightly in year three and was followed by a far more drastic turn away from involvement in security issues as they ran for re-election in year four. Although far from conclusive due to a lack of data in preceding years, Reagan's last 16 months in the Oval Office was a period of relatively high involvement that continued to climb from year 7 to year 8. Two factors may explain the discrepancy between these findings and Kessel's in year three. Kessel examined State of the Union Addresses delivered each January. As such, his method could not measure declining involvement in foreign policy during the third year. Additionally, Kessel studied an earlier era of presidents ranging from Truman to Johnson. It may be that changes in the way presidents are elected, such as the rise of the primary system (this would have mattered for Bush who faced a primary challenge) or the omnipresence of television cameras and the rise of the perpetual campaign push more recent presidents to turn away from security issues earlier than they did in the past.

## **TOWARD AN OPERATIONAL MODEL OF THE PRESIDENT'S SECURITY AGENDA**

### **INTERNATIONAL FACTORS**

EVENTS - Wood and Peake (1996: 4) claim that "even though most presidents come to office with foreign policy agendas, more often than not they have agendas thrust on them by events and circumstance." As demonstrated by the concomitant appearance of major events and "spikes" in the president's involvement in conflicts abroad, major events do appear to seize the president's attention. A conflict-by-conflict examination of the data uncovers additional examples of this phenomenon: As violence in Haiti increased in 1992 and tens of thousands of Haitian refugees set out in makeshift rafts, President Bush's attention swung toward the crisis. After presidents had ignored the civil wars in Rwanda and Burundi for years, they gained President Clinton's attention only after the conflicts burst into conflagration. The president is also likely to give higher priority when events make a resolution of a conflict appear possible. President Clinton's attention to the Israel-PLO conflict and the war in the former Yugoslavia surged to record levels as peace agreements appeared possible. This behavior is not surprising as the president saw an opportunity both to stabilize a region in turmoil and to claim a foreign policy success.

To measure this march of events, Reuters news service reports were searched for keywords indicating either an expansion or reduction of conflict (see Appendix for the search syntax). Reuters reports are commonly used in the construction of events databases because the service provides world-wide reporting of events from an international rather than regional

perspective. Thus, it is more likely that the same gauge is applied to all conflicts. Like other studies based on events data, this research assumes the number of Reuters reports increase or decrease in proportion to changes in each conflict's intensity (Schrodt 1995: 161). A crude monthly measure of the intensity of events in each conflict was created by counting the number of reports that showed up as "hits." Although it would be useful to test whether the president responds differently to escalatory or deescalatory events by creating two separate measures, this measure does not make this distinction. The hypothesis under investigation is the greater the number of events, the more likely the president is to assume a conflict as part of his agenda and the more involved he will become with the conflict.

TRADE - This study hypothesizes that the greater the amount of American trade with parties to a conflict, the more likely the president is to attend to that conflict. To measure trade, this research relied on the U.S. Bureau of the Census' annual summary of U.S. exports and imports by nation published in *The Statistical Abstract of the United States* (1988-1995) the Bureau of Census World Wide Web site.<sup>8</sup> Imports were computed on a f.a.s. basis and exports on a customs basis. These two figures were summed to measure total annual two-way trade and converted to a billions of dollars unit of measurement.

OIL THREATENED - The greater the amount of oil exports threatened by a conflict, the more likely the president is to assume the conflict on his agenda and the more attention he is likely to give it. News reports, the *Oil and Gas Information Annual* (1988-1994) and the *United Nations Statistical Yearbook* (1988-1995) were consulted to estimate the amount of crude oil exports threatened by each conflict. This figure was estimated in thousands of metric tons per year. For example, Indonesia's conflict in East Timor never affected shipments of oil abroad, so

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<sup>8</sup> For 1996, data were available for only the first six months. The figures were doubled to estimate the annual level of trade.

despite the archipelago's substantial oil exports, the value of the OIL THREATENED variable is zero throughout the conflict. The Iran-Iraq war is a case where the war's potential impact reached far beyond the warring states' borders as the war also posed a significant threat to exports from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. The value for the OIL THREATENED variable for this conflict is the sum of oil exports from these six nations, which for 1988 equaled 453,280 thousand metric tons.<sup>9</sup>

## DOMESTIC FACTORS

MEDIA ATTENTION - Presidents are highly aware of media reports and frequently feel pressured to act on issues discussed in the headlines and on TV. President Bush claimed the media's attention to the famine in Somalia in 1992 moved him to search for a solution (Wood and Peake, 7). Similarly, the daily ritual of reports on the hostages in Iran likely forced President Carter to constantly address the issue; it became impossible to simply wait it out. This study hypothesizes that expanded media attention to a conflict increases the likelihood the president will include the conflict on his agenda and increase in his involvement with the issue. To measure media attention, the Vanderbilt University television news archives were searched for references to the major combatants in each conflict in ABC, CBS and NBC evening news reports.<sup>10</sup> Although the major network evening news broadcasts are not exclusive purveyors of information, they remain the single most important source of news for most Americans and are a good proxy for the entire mainstream media. The monthly MEDIA ATTENTION measure was

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<sup>9</sup> This study also examined whether the president was more likely to attend to a conflict based on the amount of oil exported without regard to whether the conflict actually threatened oil exports. This variable did not approach statistical significance as a predictor of AGENDA or AGENDA LEVEL.

<sup>10</sup> This archive can be searched electronically at [tvnews.vanderbilt.edu](http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu).

created by inspecting all abstracts identified by the keyword search and tabulating the number of stories referencing each conflict.<sup>11</sup>

It should be noted that MEDIA ATTENTION is not fully independent of the Reuters-based measure of events. All major media outlets monitor Reuters reports. But the two measures have significant differences. The evening news is limited to about 22 minutes of broadcast each evening to cover both domestic and international issues. The stories selected generally reflect the producers' judgment of the most important issues for the American viewing audience. Reuters reports are potentially unlimited in number and length and are not directed toward any particular nationality or group. Thus, EVENTS and MEDIA ATTENTION represent different concepts. As anticipated, the measures correlate moderately with a Pearson's  $r = .48$ . This level of correlation should not pose collinearity problems in regression analysis (Fox 1991).

APPROVAL - Although there appears to be a consensus that foreign policy actions can yield a brief surge in public support for the president (Brody and Page 1975, MacKuen 1983) the impact of changes in public approval on presidential foreign policy behavior is less certain. Ostrom and Job (1986) and James and Oneal (1991) found both that high public approval was associated with an increased proclivity to employ force and that this variable was the most important influence on the decision to employ military force. James and Oneal (1991) suggest this pattern occurs because presidential popularity is an indicator of national unity and the president's freedom to act internationally. Neustadt (1980) believes public approval is a spring of political strength for both domestic and international action. Therefore, this model posits that higher public approval of the president should grant the chief executive the freedom and strength to address more issues abroad and to become more involved in them. Measures of public

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<sup>11</sup> A second measure of media attention was created by calculating the amount of time dedicated to a conflict by the evening news broadcasts each month. This measure, though, proved less powerful a predictor of presidential attention than the number of stories each month.

approval were drawn from Gallup polls. Scores were averaged when more than one survey was taken during a month. During the two months when no survey was reported by Gallup, the values for the preceding and succeeding months were averaged.

**INFLATION** - Generally, students of American politics suggest that when the president faces economic trouble, he will address economic difficulties at home rather than events abroad. International relations theorists, however, frequently claim economic troubles, "may lead the president to look for strategies to deflect attention from the lack of economic success and to bolster his sagging image" (Ostrom and Job 1986, 548; see also James and Oneal 1991; Brace and Hinckley 1992). Lacking clear guidance from the literature, this research hypothesizes that higher inflation leads to decreased attention to events abroad. Faced with a skeptical press and public, a modern president is more likely to attempt to improve his image during times of high inflation by attacking the problem directly in his rhetoric and domestic programs rather than through diversionary efforts. The Bureau of Labor Statistics monthly Consumer Price Index for All Urban consumers (CPI-U) was employed as a measure of inflation. Each monthly rate was multiplied by 12 to create an annualized inflation rate for each month.

**UNEMPLOYMENT** - Following the same logic as in the preceding variable, the higher the unemployment rate, the less likely the president is to become involved in foreign policy issues and the lower his involvement is likely to be if he does address the issue. The Bureau of Labor Statistics monthly report on the employment status of the noninstitutional civilian population 16 years and over was used as a yardstick.<sup>12</sup>

**RE-ELECTION** - Much of the literature on the president's decision to use military force suggests presidents are more likely to act abroad as elections approach (Ostrom and Job, James

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<sup>12</sup> The possibility that the misery index (an index combining inflation and unemployment) might be related to the dependent variables was also tested. It did not approach statistical significance and was near zero in effect.

and Oneal). Stoll (1984), however, found fewer uses of force in the six months prior to an election during times of peace. Kessel (1974) and Quandt (1986) claim the electoral cycle influences presidential behavior by prompting him to address domestic issues that resonate most with voters at the expense of foreign policy. Although foreign policy may have figured prominently in the elections of 1952, 1960, 1964, 1972 and 1980 (Lindsay 1992, see also Aldrich et al 1989), it is equally true that in most cases, the challenger drove the issue onto the electoral scene. President Clinton may have spoken for all incumbents in his acceptance speech at the 1996 Democratic National Convention when he said, "in most election seasons foreign policy is not a matter of great interest." This view appears to correspond with the earlier inspection of the AGENDA and AGENDA LEVEL measures.

The number of months until a sitting president faced re-election was counted to capture the potential effect of elections. This procedure results in values exceeding 48 for the waning months of the Reagan administration. This seems sensible as Reagan had no re-election concerns and followed his predecessors (Eisenhower and Johnson) in providing little aid to his party's nominee. The hypothesis is that the greater the amount of time until re-election, the less the ballot box weighs on the president's mind and the more likely he is to address events abroad.

## PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

EXPERIENCE - This study probes the role of experience in determining the president's attention to conflicts abroad as a start toward a more complete explanation of the role of the president's personal characteristics in foreign policy behavior. This study hypothesizes that experience has the effect of narrowing a president's foreign policy agenda. Guided by wisdom gained by experience, the president will choose his battles more carefully, committing his time, energy and political capital to foreign policy issues that are tractable, crucial to the nation, and

likely to improve his public stature. When attempting to measure experience, many questions quickly surface. Should Clinton's college job as an aide to Senator William Fulbright be counted the same as Bush's tenure as director of central intelligence? Should Reagan's experience as president of the Screen Actor's Guild during the "Red Scare" be considered at all? How should experience gained as president be compared to experience in a senior diplomatic post such as ambassador to the United Nations? Certainly it is true that different positions lead to qualitatively different experiences and different types of learning for presidents-to-be. Lacking a method to assess these qualitative differences, a very simple measure of experience was created by examining biographies of the presidents and tabulating the number of months the president had in positions of significant foreign policy responsibility.

## **EFFECTS OF DETERMINANTS ON AGENDA AND AGENDA LEVEL**

### **ANALYSIS OF AGENDA**

Logistic regression was employed to assess the effects of international, domestic and individual variables on the likelihood the president will address a conflict as part of his foreign policy agenda. Results are presented in Table 7. This estimate's primary goal is to demonstrate that the president's foreign policy agenda is influenced by variables from all three domains; efforts to compare the relative importance of each of the three classes of variables are secondary.

In model A1, the AGENDA variable is regressed on all international variables: OIL THREATENED, TRADE and EVENTS. All variables are statistically significant and influence the dependent variable in the predicted direction. The log-likelihood ratio statistic is statistically significant at  $p = .000$ , so the null hypothesis that all coefficients except the intercept are zero can be rejected (Aldrich and Nelson 1984: 55-56). Standard checks indicate multicollinearity is not a problem.<sup>13</sup> Logistic regression does not offer a statistic to indicate the amount of variance in the dependent variable explained by the independent variables as  $R^2$  does in ordinary least squares (OLS) regression. To fill this role and to make it possible to compare the competing models, the pseudo- $R^2$  was calculated as recommended by Aldrich and Nelson (1984: 57).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Checks for multicollinearity included examining correlation coefficients, regressing all independent variables on all others and studying Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) after re-estimating each model using OLS (ordinary least squares) regression.

<sup>14</sup> Aldrich and Nelson define this statistic as:

$$\text{pseudo-}R^2 = c/(N+c)$$

where  $c$  is the chi squared statistic and  $N$  is the total sample size. An alternative measure of fit often employed is a statement of percent of cases correctly predicted. This statistic is not useful in this case because of the very high rate of accuracy associated with picking the AGENDA measure's modal value, 0.

Model A2, the domestic variables model, is less successful. RE-ELECTION and MEDIA ATTENTION both perform as expected and are statistically significant. INFLATION and UNEMPLOYMENT show signs in the hypothesized direction but neither are significant at the .05 level, although UNEMPLOYMENT is close. Most troubling is APPROVAL, which emerged statistically significant, but in the unexpected direction.<sup>15</sup> The pseudo  $R^2 = .063$  shows that although a proportion of the variance in AGENDA can be explained by the domestic variables, the international variables appear to be stronger predictors.

The third model represents an initial probe to determine if a link can be made between the president's personal characteristics and his attention to conflicts abroad. The results of the logistic regression bode well for the hypothesis as the president's foreign policy experience is inversely related to the president's proclivity to assume additional agenda items and is statistically significant.

Model A4 attempts to integrate the three levels of variables in simple linear combination without regard to the variables' performances in previous estimates. As shown by the increased pseudo- $R^2$ , this model improves upon previous efforts. Neither APPROVAL nor INFLATION, however, approach statistical significance. The INFLATION variable may have suffered due to the consistently low inflation of the era selected for study. Had a time period with greater variation been chosen for this study, such as the late 1970's and early 1980's, it might have been possible to uncover a relationship between inflation and the president's predisposition to assume additional agenda items. INFLATION and APPROVAL are similar in that they are both

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<sup>15</sup> Some collinearity can be expected in this model as public approval of the president is closely related to health of the economy. A check on correlation coefficients revealed that no two variables were correlated at greater than Pearson's  $r = .5$ . To guard against the possibility that one variable may be collinear with a combination of other variables, VIF's (variance inflation factors) were obtained from OLS estimates. The UNEMPLOYMENT variable suffered by the most from multicollinearity with a VIF = 1.45, a size that would result in a roughly 20% increase in the standard deviation of the estimate and therefore, decreased statistical significance. Still, this level of multicollinearity is low and poses little threat to the model's integrity (Fox, 1991).

Variable	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7
OILTHREATENED							
MLE	1.38E-5			8.68E-6	8.81E-6	5.99 E-6	
SE	4.13E-6			4.47E-6	4.46 E-6	4.79 E-6	
Sig	.001			.052	.048	.211	
TRADE							
MLE	.022			.022	.022	.019	.019
SE	.005			.005	.005	.006	.006
Sig	.000			.000	.000	.001	.001
EVENTS							
MLE	.014			.013	.013	.009	.009
SE	.001			.001	.001	.001	.001
Sig	.000			.000	.000	.000	.000
APPROVAL							
MLE		-.015			-.005		
SE		.005			.007		
Sig		.004			.425		
RE-ELECTION							
MLE		.016		.020	.020	.015	.017
SE		.004		.004	.004	.004	.004
Sig		.000		.000	.000	.001	.000
MEDIA ATTN							
MLE		.175		.062	.062	.064	.070
SE		.017		.018	.018	.021	.020
Sig		.000		.001	.001	.002	.001
INFLATION							
MLE		-4.34			-.034		
SE		.342			.380		
Sig		.205			.929		
UNEMPLOYMENT							
MLE		-.150			-.196	-.170	-.087
SE		.088			.099	.090	.097
Sig		.089			.049	.059	.370
EXPERIENCE							
MLE			-.003		-.002	-.002	-.001
SE			.001		.001	.001	.001
Sig			.000		.055	.004	.054
INERTIA							
MLE						2.18	2.20
SE						.138	.138
Sig						.000	.000
Constant	-2.763	-.8572	-1.694	-1.751	-2.571	-.2.877	-3.446
-2xLLR	2178.47	2731.36	2706.52	2094.76	2095.41	1811.11	1814.17
probability	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.110	.063	.006	.131	.131	.174	.174
N=3797							

Table 7. The Determinants of AGENDA

“environmental” variables that hold the same value for all cases during the same measurement period. Because these measures do not vary across cases, it is, statistically speaking, more difficult for them to reach significance. This hurdle, however, was not insurmountable as UNEMPLOYMENT and RE-ELECTION, also both “environmental” variables that fluctuate on a monthly level, were statistically significant.

For model A5, AGENDA was regressed on those variables which were statistically significant at the .10 level in model A4. Despite the exclusion of two variables, the overall fit of the model matched that of A4. All variables are in the theorized direction and are significant at the .05 level except UNEMPLOYMENT which just misses the mark. This model also strongly rejects the null hypothesis that all parameters are equal to zero and shows very little evidence of multicollinearity. Thus, this model stands as evidence that international factors, domestic considerations and the president’s foreign policy experience all influence the president’s security agenda.

Model A5, though, considers each month as a clean slate on which the president’s foreign policy agenda is written without regard to the role of issue inertia. To capture these effects the model was re-estimated with a lagged endogenous variable, INERTIA, which considers whether the issue was on the president’s agenda in the prior month. The results of this estimation are included as A6. This model represents an improvement in overall fit. More importantly, the inclusion of the lagged endogenous variable results in statistical insignificance for the OIL THREATENED and UNEMPLOYMENT variables. Because of this, the model was re-estimated one final time without OIL THREATENED and UNEMPLOYMENT. This final model is shown as A7.

Variable	MLE	SE	Sig	Unit Size	Change in Pr(Y=1) with one unit increase
TRADE	.019	.006	.001	1 s.d. = \$8.1 billion additional trade per year	.03
EVENTS	.001	.001	.000	1 s.d. = 71.39 additional events in a month	.13
RE-ELECTION	.017	.004	.000	12 months farther from re-election	.04
MEDIA ATTENTION	.070	.020	.001	1 s.d. = 5.87 evening newscasts in a month	.08
EXPERIENCE	-.002	.001	.053	1 s.d. = 85.58 months of additional foreign policy experience	-.03
INERTIA	2.200	.138	.000	Issue was on rather than off agenda in previous month	.28

Table 8. The Effect of Change in Independent Variables on AGENDA

As a method of bringing substantive meaning to the estimate in A7, Table 8 shows the impact of a specified unit size increase in each variable on the probability a conflict will be included in the agenda while other variables are held constant at their means.<sup>16</sup> Not surprisingly, INERTIA proves to be the most powerful determinant of the president's foreign policy agenda. If a typical conflict had been on the agenda in the previous month, then there is a nearly 28% increase in the likelihood the president will address the issue in the current month.

<sup>16</sup> A one standard deviation increase was used for a unit size except for re-election where the impact of moving 12 months farther from re-election stood as a unit and the lagged endogenous variable where the effect of an issue's presence rather than absence on the previous month's agenda was calculated. When holding variables constant at their means, the lagged inertia variable was held at zero, rather than the mean of .12 which holds no meaning for this binary measure. The equation used to convert logistical regression coefficients (b) to a probability for a given set of values (X) is:

$$P_i = \exp(Z_i) / (1 + \exp(Z_i)) \text{ where } Z_i = \sum b_k X_{ik}$$

Although INERTIA is a stalwart stabilizer, it can be overcome. EVENTS and MEDIA ATTENTION also prove to be strong shapers of the agenda as a one standard deviation increase in each corresponds to a 13% and 8% increase in the likelihood of a conflict appearing on the agenda, respectively. Because both variables are skewed heavily to the right, they are potentially far more powerful than this figure reveals. Out of 3797 total cases, there are 74 readings of EVENTS and 43 readings of MEDIA ATTENTION at least three standard deviations above their means. *Ceteris paribus*, a three standard deviation increase in EVENTS yields a .26 increase in  $\text{Pr}(Y = 1)$ . An equivalent increase in MEDIA ATTENTION results in an increase of .21. Thus, it is quite plausible that a dramatic increase in either the intensity of a conflict or the media's attention to it could propel an issue onto the president's agenda without changes in other variables.

This model can verify President Bush's claim that media attention to Somalia forced the issue onto his agenda. Prior to August 1992, the media had done little reporting on the civil war and the humanitarian crisis that accompanied it. In August 1992, media attention to the issue octupled while other factors held fairly constant. President Bush addressed the Somali conflict in September 1992, briefly after the media "discovered" it.

Trade and experience in foreign policy making positions appear to be less powerful movers of the agenda but still can play a role in changing the course of the president's security agenda. The 13 year-old civil war in Sri Lanka is an example of a case where higher trade could have increased the chances of presidential attention. During the 106 months studied, no president ever addressed this war that has killed nearly 40,000 since its 1983 inception. Had Sri Lanka traded with the United States at the level of Thailand (a ten-fold increase in U.S.-Sri Lanka trade), the probability President Bush would have addressed the conflict in the middle of the era under investigation, February 1992, would have increased 5%. If Sri Lanka were a still

larger trading partner, say on the level of South Korea, the odds climb 17%. Evidence that experience alone can influence the agenda can be observed when comparing the impact of a governor elected to the presidency, such as Bill Clinton, to that of a long-time Washington foreign policy hand, as George Bush was. On their respective inauguration days, Bush had already notched 180 months of foreign policy making experience compared to Clinton's zero. This difference alone decreased the likelihood the typical conflict would rise to Bush's attention by 6%. Over the large number of conflicts facing the Bush administration, the focusing effect of Bush's pre-presidential foreign policy experience likely helped trim the size of Bush's foreign policy agenda and kept numerous issues from reaching the Oval Office.

#### ANALYSIS OF AGENDA LEVEL

What factors influence the level of the president's involvement in a foreign policy issue? To answer this question, a series of models were estimated using OLS regression to examine the effects of the determinants on the AGENDA LEVEL variable. These results of these models are displayed in Table 9.

In the first three models, the explanatory power of each class of variables is tested without regard to the others. The most striking feature of models B1, B2 and B3 is how poorly the majority of domestic variables performed. APPROVAL, RE-ELECTION and UNEMPLOYMENT were all near zero in parameter size and far from statistical significance.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The Durbin-Watson statistic and PACF and ACF plots reveal a pattern of positive serial autocorrelation in Models B1, B2, B3, B4, and B5. Although a violation of OLS assumptions, no effort was made to correct for this autocorrelation in these early models because it was suspected that this autocorrelation resulted from a failure to acknowledge the role of inertia. The inclusion of the lagged endogenous variable for inertia corrected the autocorrelation problem. With the inclusion of the inertia variable, the Durbin-Watson statistic shows no sign of first order autocorrelation at the .01 confidence level. PACF and ACF plots also fail to show evidence of autocorrelation. The problem in Models B1-B5 therefore, was primarily specification error rather than serial autocorrelation.

Variable	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5	B6	B7
OILTHREATENED							
$\beta$	3.46E-5			-2.01E-5	-2.05E-5	-2.47E-5	-2.49E-5
SE	7.23E-6			6.63E-6	6.62E-6	6.13E-6	6.12E-6
Std. Beta	.068			-.040	-.041	-.054	-.055
Sig	.000			.003	.002	.000	.000
TRADE							
$\beta$	.039			.034	.034	.029	.029
SE	.011			.010	.010	.009	.009
Std. Beta	.051			.044	.045	.043	.043
Sig	.000			.000	.000	.001	.001
EVENTS							
$\beta$	.044			.025	.025	.021	.021
SE	.011			.001	.001	.001	.001
Std. Beta	.497			.285	.286	.268	.268
Sig	.000			.000	.000	.000	.000
APPROVAL							
$\beta$		-.003		.016	.010	.007	
SE		.007		.008	.007	.006	
Std. Beta		-.005		.032	.020	.017	
Sig		.698		.037	.134	.240	
RE-ELECTION							
$\beta$		1.913		.000			
SE		.006		.006			
Std. Beta		.001		.001			
Sig		.973		.972			
MEDIA ATTN							
$\beta$		.634		.501	.500	.316	.317
SE		.014		.016	.016	.019	.019
Std. Beta		.599		.474	.472	.260	.261
Sig		.000		.000	.000	.000	.000
INFLATION							
$\beta$		-1.075		-.217			
SE		.491		.501			
Std. Beta		-.031		-.006			
Sig		.029		.665			
UNEMPLOYMENT							
$\beta$		.017		.192			
SE		.129		.132			
Std. Beta		.002		.023			
Sig		.895		.148			

(continued on next page)

Table 9. The Determinants of AGENDA LEVEL

Table 9. (continued)

EXPERIENCE							
	$\beta$		-.003	-.004	-.004	.007	-.003
	SE		.001	.001	.001	.006	.001
	Std. Beta		-.037	-.058	-.051	.017	-.040
	Sig		.023	.000	.000	.001	.002
INERTIA-LEVEL							
	$\beta$					.280	.279
	SE					.015	.015
	Std. Beta					.278	.278
	Sig					.000	.000
Constant	-.743	.664	1.16	.073	.121	.201	.613
Significance	.000	.000	.023	.000	.000	.000	.000
Adjusted R2	.266	.356	.001	.426	.426	.401	.401
Standard Error	5.41	4.99	6.21	4.78	4.79	4.28	4.28
Durbin-Watson	1.38	1.23	1.19	1.36	1.35	1.95	1.95
N=3797 for all							

In the first two integrative models, B4 and B5, OIL THREATENED, TRADE, EVENTS and MEDIA ATTENTION are all statistically significant and substantively “non-zero” in parameter size. EXPERIENCE reaches statistical significance but with a near zero coefficient. As with the role of inertia in previous models, it seems reasonable that a president who had invested a great deal of time, energy and political capital in an issue in the past is likely to follow up on that investment with high levels of involvement in the future. A new model, B6, was estimated incorporating a lagged endogenous variable, INERTIA-LEVEL, expressing the number of paragraph references the president dedicated to the conflict in the previous month. Because APPROVAL in Model B6 was both near zero in parameter size and statistically insignificant, the model was re-estimated without it, creating the final model, B7. Although B7 has a lower  $R^2$  than B5, it is accepted as a superior model. B5 failed to consider the role of inertia, which had been established as a major factor in the previous estimates. Additionally, the

autocorellation present in B5 violated OLS assumptions. B7 corrects for these problems at a relatively small cost in terms of the model's fit.

The final model reveals the tide of events and the media spotlight match the strength of issue inertia in determining the president's level of involvement in conflicts. The president's involvement is also likely to be greater with increased level of trade, although the overall effect will in almost all cases be far smaller than that of the major determinants. Although statistically significant, EXPERIENCE is substantively insignificant. With the size of the parameter in this estimate, a president would have to spend over 33 years in foreign policy making circles to yield a change of one additional comment per month for each crisis. The magnitude of the estimate for OIL THREATENED suggests that when a war endangers shipments from a major oil exporting region, the president's involvement in the conflict is affected. But the inverse relationship between OIL THREATENED and the level of the president's involvement is contrary to the hypothesis and remains perplexing. This inverse relationship may result from a reliance on the president's speeches and comments as an indicator of the chief executive's involvement. It may be that when sparks fly in the highly combustible Middle East and other oil production centers, the president proceeds more cautiously than he would if oil interests were not involved. Because the president does not want to escalate a crisis in a region where stability is essential for the industrialized world's economy and quite possibly his own political fate, the president may restrain his rhetoric and tread more cautiously than he would otherwise.

## DISPELLING AN ALTERNATIVE HYPOTHESIS

The final models, A7 and B7, suggest the intensity of events and media attention are the two major forces that redirect the president's attention to conflicts abroad. It is probable the causal arrow between these explanatory variables and the dependent variables run in both directions. Although changes in the intensity of conflict and the level of media coverage likely cause the president to notice an issue, it is also true that presidential attention to an issue can both affect the intensity of a conflict and direct media attention to it. The other explanatory variables are not susceptible to this alternative hypothesis because no matter how fervently a president may wish for the power to immediately alter the electoral calendar, the amount of foreign policy experience he brings to office, the state of economy or trade relations, he possesses no such power.

It is possible to garner evidence that at least intuitively helps refute this rival hypothesis.<sup>18</sup> As shown in Table 10 a logistic regression model of AGENDA was estimated on three explanatory variables, PRE-EVENTS, EVENTS, and POST-EVENTS. EVENTS is the count of events in the same month as the measure of AGENDA. Naturally, this likely includes both changes in a conflict's intensity which precipitated the president's attention to a conflict

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<sup>18</sup> A standard approach to this problem in time series analysis is to use shorter periods for measurement, such as weeks. This alternative is highly impractical in this case as a change to weeks would create an enormous number of "0" values for AGENDA and AGENDA LEVEL, thus leaving proportionally very few affirmative cases to study.

Variable		
PRE-EVENTS		
MLE	.005	
SE	.001	
Sig	.000	
EVENTS		
MLE	.007	
SE	.001	
Sig	.000	
POST-EVENTS		
MLE	.003	
SE	.001	
Sig	.005	
PRE-MEDIA		
MLE	.042	
SE	.015	
Sig	.006	
MEDIA		
MLE	.142	
SE	.020	
Sig	.000	
POST-MEDIA		
MLE	.012	
SE	.008	
Sig	.132	
Constant	-2.721	-2.245
-2xLLR	2171.174	2510.382
probability	.000	.000
pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.113	.056
N=3661		

Table 10. Establishing the Temporal Order of AGENDA, EVENTS and MEDIA ATTENTION

and those that followed it. PRE-EVENTS is the value of the EVENTS measure for the month preceding the measure of AGENDA. POST-EVENTS is the value of EVENTS for the month following the president's action. This exercise was repeated to test whether MEDIA ATTENTION primarily caused or resulted from presidential attention using two additional new variables, PRE-MEDIA and POST-MEDIA. These estimates are shown in Table 10.

As should be anticipated, the strongest predictor of AGENDA is EVENTS in the current month. But for this exercise it is more relevant that PRE-EVENTS is more closely tied to AGENDA than POST-EVENTS. This suggests the mix of attacks, battle deaths, peace negotiations, agreements and other elements of conflict that comprise the EVENTS measure primarily precede and cause change in the president's foreign policy agenda rather than follow it. The test involving MEDIA ATTENTION furnished similar results, suggesting the media's influence on the president's agenda is greater than the president's role in guiding media attention. These findings complement Wood and Peake's (1996: 19-21) conclusions using vector autoregressive techniques.

## CONCLUSIONS

The president's attention is a limited and valuable commodity. In a world that often appears to be a swirl of issues, the president is very selective in the issues he chooses to address. Inertia is the most powerful force in determining whether a conflict appears on the president's security agenda. This force for continuity arises from numerous sources: the intractability of foreign policy issues, the president's familiarity with some topics and not others, the president's interest in pursuing solutions to issues he has already associated himself with, media follow-up on issues previously on the agenda and an echo effect from the Congress and the bureaucracy that may have taken up an issue after the president addressed it initially. But as in nature, inertia can be overcome. This investigation has uncovered evidence that factors from the international environment, domestic politics and the president's foreign policy experience strongly influence the issues the president will address. Because inertia is a weaker force in determining the president's level of involvement with conflicts, these sources of change are more important in setting the president's level of involvement in a conflict than deciding whether the conflict will appear on his agenda.

A change in the intensity of a dispute, such as evidence of expanding conflict or the emergence of an opportunity for a resolution, is the single most powerful force for change in the president's security agenda. The more significant the expansion or contraction of conflict, the greater the portion of the agenda the conflict will occupy. This claim complements realist expectations that states respond to the behavior of other states on a tit-for-tat basis (Axelrod

1984). A broadening of conflict may pose a threat to American or allied interests and compel the president to respond. Moves toward peace or resolution also pique the president's interests as the president must protect American interests in any agreement or understanding between parties. Additionally, the president may desire an affiliation with a peaceful resolution simply to claim a foreign policy success at home.

The president's increased likelihood to delve into events that threaten the nation's trading partners and oil sources provides additional evidence that the chief executive watches out for the nation's economic interests on the world scene. This study, however, failed to uncover evidence that the state of the domestic economy directly influenced the president's agenda.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, contrary to many previous studies of the president's foreign policy behavior, public approval of the president also does not appear to be related to the president's agenda. In both the case of the economy and public approval, a major difference between this study and others is that the majority of others find these variables are related to the decision to use force, a foreign policy behavior of a very different type. My findings more closely parallel Lindsay et al (1991) and Wood and Peake (1996), who also based their studies in lower levels of foreign policy activity. This research into the determinants of conflict and cooperation found a weak relationship between foreign policy behavior and the economy and no discernible relationship between public approval of the president and foreign policy behavior.

Media attention is by far the most powerful domestic influence on the president's foreign policy agenda. The more frequently the media address an issue, the more likely the president is to become involved with that issue and the higher his level of involvement is likely to be. Media

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<sup>19</sup> Inflation and unemployment are both direct, albeit lagging, indicators of the nation's economic health. The president may be influenced by how the public feels about the economy rather than how it is actually performing. Measures such as the Index of Consumer Sentiment or the misery index weighted by the proportion of Americans who believe the economy is the greatest problem facing the country may better capture this concept.

attention may be a more prominent influence because it is seen as guide to the specific issues the public is likely to find important. Thus, by following media attention the president can respond to the public's concerns on an issue by issue basis.

An approaching re-election campaign narrows the president's general tendency to take on foreign policy issues. Despite this, significant changes in other variables, especially events and media attention, can still push an issue onto the president's agenda. Even in an election year, the president cannot ignore foreign policy entirely or he will be vulnerable to his opponents' criticism. Quandt (1986) suggests the electoral cycle influences the type and style of foreign policy pursued. In an election year, the president tries to avoid controversy, steer clear of new initiatives and handle crises as they emerge. This study had no way of capturing these changes.

The president's experience in making foreign policy decisions also affects his propensity to attend to security issues. A president with foreign policy experience understands the uses and limits of his authority and the intractability of security problems. As described by Burke and Greenstein (1989), Eisenhower's understanding of the complexities of Vietnamese nationalism, French colonialism, geography and the nature of the war in Vietnam strongly influenced his decision not to intervene after Dien Bien Phu. Lacking similar experience, Johnson failed to understand the immense challenges Vietnam presented and was willing to attempt what his more experienced predecessor was not. Experience may teach presidents to conserve resources and apply them at the right point and time.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

There are a great many potential influences on the president's foreign policy agenda and presidential foreign policy behavior which remain uninvestigated. Some of these factors may

influence the president's general willingness to adopt foreign policy issues, others may influence a particular issue's likelihood of receiving presidential attention. One shortfall of this study is the failure to investigate both these "environmental" and "opportunity-specific" variables across all three sources of foreign policy, international, domestic and personal. Future studies could pick up at this point.

Level of Variable	Environmental Variables	Opportunity-Specific Variables
International	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Role and Strength of International Institutions</li> <li>- Structure of International System (bipolar, weak bipolar, unipolar, etc...)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Change in Conflict Intensity</li> <li>- Access to Oil/Resources</li> <li>- Trade Relations</li> </ul>
Domestic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Economy</li> <li>- Public Approval</li> <li>- Electoral Cycle</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Media Attention</li> <li>- Interest Group Activism</li> <li>- Congressional Activism</li> <li>- Bureaucratic Activism</li> </ul>
Personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Experience</li> <li>- Interest in Foreign Policy</li> <li>- Sensitivity</li> <li>- Method of Analyzing Info/Options</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Regional Expertise</li> <li>- Regional Interest</li> </ul>

Table 11. Some Potential Sources of Presidential Foreign Policy Behavior

This study was limited to an investigation of the president's attention to armed conflicts. Although security issues are an important portion of the president's foreign policy agenda, any full explanation of agenda-setting in U.S. foreign policy must consider how the many different types of foreign policy issues reach the president's agenda. This requirement necessitates a more complete understanding of the issues that comprise the foreign policy agenda. One method of ascertaining the full agenda's composition would be to systematically code the archives of an administration that has had its records largely opened to the public. This exercise would offer fuller insight into the extent and variety of foreign policy issues weighed by the president and would generate hypotheses as to how issues seized the president's attention. This approach

would also likely facilitate an initial exploration of the contributions of a number of variables listed in Table 11, especially bureaucratic and interest group activism.

A comparison of this research with explanations of other types of presidential foreign policy behavior cited in this study suggests the dependent variable studied greatly alters the findings uncovered. It is, therefore, less useful to argue about whether international, domestic or individual characteristics are important in determining foreign policy behavior than to identify the contributions of each under different situations, the role of specific variables from each category, and the relationships between variables. These goals are most likely to be achieved through diversity in the types of behavior studies, theoretical approaches and methods employed.

## APPENDIX

A two-level Lexis-Nexis search was employed to create EVENTS, a monthly measure of the intensity of each conflict. The first level attempted to find a large number of Reuters reports related to an escalation or de-escalation of the conflict:

publication (reuters) and headline (the name of all parties to the conflict and the nations in which the conflict occurred) and (kill! or battle! or conflict! or dead! or death! or attack! or peace! or talk! or agreement! or treaty! or pact!) and date is (inclusive date of conflict)

The second level attempted to filter out reports that were likely to be unrelated to the conflict. This set of keywords was established in an examination of the “hits” received by the first level search:

and not (business! or compan! or merger! or acquisition! or accident! or crash! or flood! or debt! or earthquake! or hurricane! or typhoon! or cyclone! or malaria or typhoid or influenza or virus! or aids or game! or match! or score! or tourn!)

The “hits” which remained after this two-level search were counted as the number of EVENTS for each month.

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